



Maryland Department of Disabilities - Press Release

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Governor Ehrlich Receives National Honor for Commitment to Disability Community

ANNAPOLIS -- Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., received the national "Secretary's Highest Recognition" Award from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) yesterday for his commitment to empowering Maryland's disability community. Governor Ehrlich earned the award for establishing the nation's first Cabinet-level Department of Disabilities and for elevating issues concerning individuals with disabilities to a Cabinet-level priority.

"I am honored to receive this important award," said Governor Ehrlich. "Individuals with disabilities want what everyone else wants - to be treated with dignity, a chance to work, and a place in their community among friends and family. I established the nation's first Cabinet-level Department of Disabilities last year to give individuals with disabilities a voice at the highest levels of state government and to help them reach their personal and professional goals. We've made tremendous progress to date, and I look forward to working with Maryland's disability community toward even greater successes in the years to come."

"Americans of all ages with disabilities of all kinds deserve the opportunity to lead productive, independent lives with the dignity they gain from being involved and engaged in work, in school, in devotion to family and faith, and in their communities as a whole," HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt said. "HHS and the entire Bush administration celebrate their achievements and remain committed to assuring that people with disabilities are able to use their skills and talents to realize their full potential as contributing Americans."

This award marks the third time in the past five months that Governor Ehrlich has been recognized nationally for his contributions in this arena. In June, Governor Ehrlich was named the "Governor of the Year" for 2004 by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS) Board of Directors in Washington, D.C. He also received one of the first-ever "Freedom to Compete Awards" from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) recognizing initiatives that promote fair and open competition in the workplace and for his commitment to creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

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*This document is available in
alternative formats upon request.*

Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor ~ Michael S. Steele, Lt. Governor
Kristen Cox, Secretary ~ Diane McComb, Deputy Secretary

Yesterday's third annual "Celebrating Persons with Disabilities" event helps promote awareness of the abilities of people with disabilities during October's National Disability Awareness Month. The Department presented the Secretary's Highest Recognition Award to seven honorees for advancing the goals of the Americans with Disabilities Act and New Freedom Initiative to eliminate barriers that keep people with disabilities from participating fully in community life.

Other award winners include:

- **Extreme Makeover: Home Edition** (Los Angeles, CA), *the award-winning television show*, for extraordinary contributions to educate America about disabilities and to demonstrate how universal design and innovative home accommodations, the spirit of community involvement, and corporate creativity can help people with disabilities enjoy lives of promise, purpose, and value.
- **American Academy of Pediatrics** (Elk Grove Village, IL), *a professional medical association focused on the health and wellness of children and youth*, for creating and implementing the Medical Home concept that promotes accessible, continuous, integrated, family-centered primary care services for children with special needs and their families.
- **Deaf West Theatre** (Los Angeles, CA), *one of the premier innovators in deaf theater*, for its award-winning contributions to enrich the cultural lives of deaf and hard-of-hearing actors and theater patrons nationwide by bridging the gap between the deaf and hearing worlds through theater.
- **Jayne Greenberg, Ph.D.** (Miami, FL), *Executive Director of the Division of Life Skills and Special Projects, Miami-Dade County Public Schools*, for pioneering work and partnership to implement throughout the Miami-Dade school district the *I Can Do It; You Can Do It* program, a physical fitness and well-being initiative for children and youth with disabilities.
- **William Henderson, Jr., Ed.D** (Dorchester, MA), *Principal of the award-winning Patrick O'Hearn School*, for tireless effort as an educator and a person with a disability to create a model of inclusion and success for children with disabilities at O'Hearn Elementary School.
- **Sound Associates, Inc.** (NY), *Tony award-winning sound company for Broadway and beyond*, for distinguished contributions that bring the magic of live theater to persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or with limited vision through the development and application of assistive technologies.

"This celebration reminds America that disability does not mean inability," said HHS Office on Disability Director Margaret J. Giannini, M.D. "The honorees today are helping 54 million persons with disabilities live the goals of President Bush's New Freedom Initiative. We salute them."

For more information on HHS's Office on Disability and the HHS awards ceremony, visit www.hhs.gov

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